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AUTHOR Uselman, Judith
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ABSTRACT

This practicum project was designed to increase student ownership of learning through student-kept assignment calendars and portfolios. The subjects, 63 junior high school students at a private Christian school, were also involved in frequent, cooperative sessions in which they checked each other's work and offered suggestions, with reports to the teacher following each such work session. Student-led parent conferences were conducted at the conclusion of the practicum. Evaluation results indicated that at the end of the practicum, 45 of the 62 students who finished the practicum were recording all their assignments on the assignment calendar and keeping all their assignment papers. A total of 44 students were turning in every assignment on time and correcting all papers that were not done well. During this time, eighth graders received three grades each and seventh graders received two grades each, for a total of 159 grades given. Of that number, 79 rose, 45 remained the same, and 36 dropped. There were also a number of unplanned outcomes. Positive relationships developed among many of the students, and almost all students were very effective in conducting the parent conferences, showing parents their grades, explaining them by using materials in their portfolios, and presenting their plans for improvement. (Contains 37 references.) (Author/KDFB)

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ED 401 010

Aiding Seventh and Eighth Graders at a Private Christian School to Take Ownership of Their Own Learning

by
Judith Uselman
Cluster 73

A Practicum I Report Presented to
the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
1996

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APPROVAL PAGE

This practicum took place as described.

Bruce Long

Verifier: Bruce Long

Junior high - high school Principal

Title

2930 West Bethany Home, PHX AZ 85017

Address

April 15, 1996

Date

This practicum report was submitted by Judith Uselman under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

Date of final Approval of Report

Dr. Linda Goldsmith, Advisor

Acknowledgments

Thanks to my fellow teachers who have answered questions,
filled out questionnaires, done innumerable favors for me,
and listened to me talk of nothing but my practicum for the past six months,

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more requests than I had asked for in the past 20 years,

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helping me work out computer problems
when she had her own graduate work to do,

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thousands of dollars on getting me the equipment that I
needed for this project but could never have afforded myself,

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and a joy to have in my house,

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in the first place with all my younger, intelligent classmates,
and who gave me the ability to get things finished correctly
and in on time.

I did not do this alone

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Abstract

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Junior high students at the practicum school had not consistently demonstrated evidence of any ownership of learning. A majority frequently came to class unprepared or with lessons half done, and the same group showed no interest in making up poorly- done work unless some penalty were instituted.

This practicum was designed to increase student ownership of learning among the 63 junior high students at the practicum school by institution of student-kept assignment calendars and portfolios. Students were involved in frequent, cooperative sessions in which they checked each other's work and offered helpful suggestions; reports to the teacher followed each such work session. Student-led parent conferences were planned for the conclusion of the practicum.

At the close of the practicum, a total of 45 of the 62 students who finished the practicum were writing all assignments on their assignment calendars and keeping all their papers. A total of 44 students were turning in every assignment on time and correcting all papers that were not well done. Eighth graders received three grades each and seventh graders received two grades each. A total of 159 grades were given. Of that number, 79 grades rose, 45 stayed the same, and 36 dropped. There were a number of unplanned outcomes, the most rewarding of which was the positive relationships that developed among many of the students. Nearly all students did a very fine job with their conferences, showing parents their grades, explaining these by using the material in their portfolios, and finally, presenting their plans for improvement.

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May 16, 1996 (date)

Judith Uselman (signature)

CHAPTER I: Background

Description of the Community

This writer conducted her practicum in a Christian school of 400 students (grades K-12) located in a large, southwestern, desert city of 1.5 million people including suburbs. Minority groups make up a sizable portion of the population (Hispanic, 18.8%; African American, 3%; Native American, 5.6%; Asian American, 1.5%, and people who categorize themselves as "other," 9.1%). Racial tensions do occur, but they are not as common as in some large cities, possibly due in part to the bond created by our professional basketball team whose players, both back and white, are extremely popular with almost everyone.

The school is situated in a middle-class, residential section facing one of the main thoroughfares and across the street on one side from a large apartment complex. It is less than a mile from one of the freeways and about two miles from a major shopping mall. The entire campus sits on 15 acres in the northwest section of the city near one of the suburbs.

Description of the Work Setting

The school's small, original structure still stands in the midst of the elementary buildings. It now houses the nurse's office and teachers' lounge. Elementary classrooms and the room where lunches are dispersed surround the school auditorium. The campus library has 8,612 books and 1,222 magazines (more for elementary and junior high than for high school), and the librarian constantly works at upgrading and weeding materials. She has been working at getting everything on computer for five

years. The school employs a highly qualified (as described by the accreditation committee) registered nurse half time, and a lunch attendant who manages the preparation of microwavable items, fruit, milk and snacks.

The institution began with kindergarten 40 years ago and has a history of families and extended families continuing the tradition of sending their children where "they went to school." For example, this writer taught the young man in charge of maintenance. She now teaches his oldest child who is an eighth grader. The principal attended as a child, did his student teaching in its junior high department, and spent several years as one of its instructors before going elsewhere to get more experience and his graduate degree. He returned as vice principal and last year moved up to the position of principal. His four children now attend the school.

The majority (82 %) of the students at the practicum school are white, 10.7% are Hispanic, 2.5% are African American, 2.2% are Asian American, and 1.1% identify themselves as "other." These are predominantly Native Americans.

Parents are heavily involved, most of them by choice (according to their own testimony) but also by decision of the school board. School policy requires junior high and senior high parents to attend monthly parent-teacher meetings and three parent-teacher-student conferences per year; in addition, they must spend a certain amount of time assisting with janitorial duties. If the latter is not possible or practical, they may arrange for substitutes. A parent-initiated volunteer booth was one of the high points at this year's open house and attracted volunteers for about half of this year's projects.

Emphasis in junior high is on basic education with strict standards for high grades. The grading scale is as follows: 93-100=A; 85-92=B; 75-84=C; 70-74=D. The high school curriculum is college prep, but last year, classes were added for students who plan to enter the work force right after graduation. Administration and teachers make provision for students with special needs in all grades, and the administration is implementing plans to expand that aspect. There is no special education teacher on staff at this time; however, a special education teacher is available to the school, and evaluates students and consults with teachers when students have special needs.

The high school has been in existence for eight years. Average enrollment is generally 75. So far, 95% of the school's students have graduated or transferred to other schools. All those who dropped out were later persuaded to obtain their GED. Graduation classes have been small averaging 20-25 students, so students were relatively easy to contact and follow up. Because the school is small and private, not eligible for public funds, the number of teachers hired limits the variety of subjects offered. For example, the foreign language offered is Spanish, the science courses consist of biology, chemistry, and physics. In the extra-curricular realm, athletic offerings for both boys and girls are limited to two or three sports for which any one person can try out in any given year.

School policy requires high school students to find part-time employment and pay the school two dollars per day in addition to what their parents are charged. The school puts one dollar of that toward each student's tuition, and the other into a fund that accrues interest. At graduation, the principal presents the student with a check for

the amount contributed plus interest in the hope that he or she will use it to pay part of his or her first-year college expenses.

The principal requires students to make a computer search of colleges and scholarships available early in their senior year, if they have not already done so, and encourages them to start submitting the necessary paperwork. The current senior class is typical of the number of the students who attend college. Of this group, two of the students plan to attend a Bible college, six plan community college attendance, one plans nursing school, and two are undecided.

Students spending junior high (seventh and eighth grade) in this school come out knowing a great deal about grammar, and the majority are able to perform better than average on grammar exercises, tests, and compositions. Students' standardized test scores are above average in language and math most years. The homework load is heavy, and the school offers sports and drama activities, music conferences, science fairs, spelling bees, and math olympics. In addition to the language, math, science, social studies, and computer classes, all students take part in a daily Bible class and attend chapel services once a week. Every homeroom also has a devotional period at the beginning of the day, and teachers take part in a prayer meeting before students are scheduled to arrive.

Discipline is strict, a system of conduct marks and irresponsibility marks resulting in loss of privilege and after school sessions for offenders is in place. Administration and teachers attempt to keep parents closely informed about students' academic progress, conduct, and responsibility. However, there are frequent, short-term

breakdowns in the communication about academics due to students' neglect in communicating with their parents on this issue. Although new students are not generally accepted into grades seven through twelve unless they have a history of Christian school attendance, some exceptions are made.

The school is run by the school board which is made up of members of the sponsoring church, its pastor, and the principal of the school, who is also a church member. The church is a small, fundamental, Christian group, a part of a well established denomination.

The average teacher has spent 10.4 years at the school. Of the school's 13 teachers, 11 are Arizona state certified, one has allowed her certification to lapse, and the engineer (who is one of our most recent additions) is not state certified. Two part time teachers are state certified, four are not. All but three are certified with ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International). Three of the ACSI certifications are temporary, 11 are standard and two are professional certificates. All teachers are working toward permanent status.

Staff members belong to various Christian congregations in town, and are professing, practicing Christians who have agreed in their contracts to abide by the code as set out by the school board. It is understood that any teacher or other staff member who violates the provisions of the contract, whether or not the violation took place on the school grounds or somewhere else, will terminate relations with the school.

The mission statement of the school is as follows: "_____Christian School exists to serve the body of Christ, the Church, and to impact the world for the Lord Jesus Christ through a curriculum of elementary and secondary academic study. All studies are planned to be fully grounded in and integrated with the Bible--the inerrant and authoritative Word of God. _____Christian School is a servant of the parent(s), (the primary responsible authority in the education of children) and seeks to cooperate with parent, church, and other authorities to inculcate Christian character, Christian values, and Christ honoring behavior in the lives of children. The means of our ministry is academics in which we strive for excellence, comprehensiveness, and integration with all of God's truth. But, the object and ultimate goal of our ministry is the glory of God in Christ, and this by seeking to reproduce His life, righteousness, and character in the lives of those entrusted to our care and nurturing."

Last year an ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International) accreditation team visited the school following a year long self study and preparation by the staff, students, parents, and administration. The association granted accreditation for a period of six years with a one-year extension. This summer, the association contacted the principal recommending that he petition for another year which, if granted, will bring the school up to the maximum length of ACSI accreditation period allowed. Currently, the administration is making plans for everyone to study the list of recommendations, one section at a time, in order to make improvements. One of the planned improvements is an addition onto the gymnasium, currently being built, that will house both boys' and girls' locker rooms and a band room.

The elementary (kindergarten-six) and junior high (seventh and eighth) home rooms sit on the original five acres immediately adjoining the ten-acre high school area. There is much crossover due to the presence of only one science lab, home economics room, shop, gymnasium, and student lunchroom, all of which are on the high school side of the plant. High school students have a number of study halls, Spanish classes, and math classes in junior high classrooms to make provision for convenient scheduling of all junior and senior high classes.

Writer's Role

This writer is currently the teacher of longest standing at the practicum school, having begun in September of 1972. Two years ago when the school was preparing for ACSI accreditation, she served as a member of the steering committee. She enjoys her role as "mother hen" and tries not to take advantage of it. She has full accreditation status with both the state and ACSI, and plans to upgrade it to the highest level upon receiving her Ed.D.

The practicum classroom faces the high school campus on the east side and the elementary campus on the west. At the beginning of the day, the basic arrangement of the room is that of desks facing each other with a large open space in the center. Teacher and students rearrange furniture several times a day depending on the activities planned. The teacher's desk is at one end of the room and the chalk boards are at the opposite end. Bulletin boards cover a portion of three of the walls (small one over the chalkboard), and windows run most of the length of the fourth wall. The floor

is not carpeted, which makes the noise level higher, especially with all the moving of chairs that goes on.

Junior high includes seventh and eighth grades. Class size ranges from 16 to 30. There is no consistent ratio of boys to girls. Occasionally a class will have only one boy and sometimes a class will have a half dozen girls and 15 boys. This year there are two classes of eighth graders numbering 18 in the writer's home room and 16 in the other eighth grade class that she is teaching. One class of 29 seventh graders includes all students in that grade.

Due to the strict discipline, the behavior problems in the classroom usually consist of gum chewing, talking, note passing, and some lying and cheating. During the past 23 years, the school has had one drug and one alcohol related incident. It has, unfortunately, had three or four suicide attempts, and one former student was successful.

The day is divided into seven periods beginning with homeroom which has been eighth grade for all but two or three years of the writer's tenure at the school. She frequently has to change rooms, and has been in her current location for two years. Generally, her teaching load consists of three junior high English classes, an eighth grade history class or two, a ninth grade English class and one study hall.

History classes see a lot of individual student reports, mini cooperative activities, and impromptu reenactments of historical events. English classes are made up of grammar sessions, spelling classes, literature studies, and composition writing.

At the end of the year, all the seventh and eighth graders must pass a comprehensive, grammar exam with a grade of 75% or better. Those who fail to make 75%, take another, similar exam. They continue to take the test until they all pass. The writer conducts voluntary, after-school sessions to help everyone get through the tests successfully. Usually six to ten students fail to make the grade the first time through. Some must repeat it three times. Special education students are excused from this requirement.

This writer works very hard at never saying "no, that's wrong" to any student response or statement, and she tries to encourage students to think things through and form their own opinions. It is her opinion that most of her students are learning not to accept something without first seeing the evidence. One of her greater challenges is to help them question what they are being told, but to do it in a respectful, positive way.

Extra-curricular teacher duties for this writer consist mostly of organizing and overseeing drama and spelling activities. In recent years, the number of drama performances has increased while the spelling bees have taken a smaller place.

Administration wants all students to take part in at least one school performance. They assign Thanksgiving activities and Easter programs on alternate years. One of the high school teachers takes whichever program the junior high does not cover. (Elementary students take part in one of two Christmas presentations annually) In addition, this writer organizes and directs a school play and a drama night each year with both junior and senior high school students participating.

CHAPTER II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that junior high students (grades seven and eight) at the practicum school had not taken ownership of their own learning. There was little evidence that they felt responsible for their education or that their interest in doing a good job took up much of their thinking. The evidence that they considered learning as a preparation for their future to be worth much time was not impressive.

Problem Description

Students did not write down assignments and directions as the teachers gave them; if they had written them initially, they lost their instructions and they subsequently forgot what they were supposed to do. They asked the teachers the same questions and got the same answers over and over. Those who were constantly lagging behind did not turn in assigned work when it was due or did not redo work that they had failed to do correctly in the first place.

Educators at the practicum school give irresponsibility marks for work not turned in on time, and an accumulation of these marks results in an after-school detention period and a lower report-card grade. These measures have not been effective with all students.

Problem Documentation

Teacher observation.

This writer kept a record from September 11 through September 22, 1995 recording the following:

1. Number of times seventh- and eighth-grade students in three groups (totaling 63) asked for confirmation of the same assignment;

2. Number of students in the same three groups who did not have their assignment written down, as determined by a surprise check; and

3. Number of irresponsibility marks given for not having assignments completed on time. The following is a result of those records:

1. Of the questions asked by students (after those questions were answered in detail in class with subsequent discussions and student acknowledgment that they understood completely) more requests to repeat instructions came from seventh graders than from eighth graders. The topic was a selection from Kipling's Jungle Book. When all 29 agreed that they understood their responsibility completely, the writer began to record the number of times they asked questions that she had already answered about the assignment. From the time she made the assignment until it was due one week later, students asked for repetition 14 times. The most frequently asked question in grade eight also concerned a literature assignment. The 34 students in the two classes asked for the same information nine times.

2. The writer conducted a surprise check to find out how many students had written down the assignment due that day. She asked them to produce an assignment

notebook, assignment calendar, or just a piece of paper (other than the homework paper itself) with the assignment written on it. Of the 29 students in seventh grade, five were able to produce evidence that they had written down the original instructions; of the 34 eighth graders, 15 showed written instructions.

3. During the two-week period used for gathering evidence of a problem, the same 29 students in grade seven accumulated 23 irresponsibility marks for not bringing completed work to class on time. The eighth graders received far fewer; one eighth grade boy accumulated four irresponsibility marks, but the total for the other 33 eighth graders was under ten.

Questionnaire Results

This writer asked her fellow junior high teachers to fill out a questionnaire to further establish the existence of a student-ownership problem at the practicum school (see Appendix A). Teachers turned in one sheet for each class taught; this was three for most teachers. (They delivered a total of 17 questionnaire sheets to the writer.) All but one was completely filled out (see Appendix B).

Teacher A reported that in one seventh-grade and two eighth-grade classes totaling 63 students, four of them regularly came to class unprepared, 13 occasionally came unprepared, and 46 rarely or never came unprepared.

Teacher B recorded that in the same three groups totaling 63, four to seven students regularly came to class unprepared, three to seven occasionally came unprepared, and 55 rarely or never came unprepared.

Teacher C stated that in the three groups totaling 63, none regularly arrived unprepared, three to six occasionally were not prepared, and 57-61 rarely or never arrived unprepared.

Teacher D reported that in three groups totaling 63, eleven regularly reported to class unprepared, 11 occasionally were similarly negligent, and 41 rarely or never were unprepared.

Teacher E wrote that in her three groups totaling 34, three or four regularly arrived unprepared, nine or ten occasionally were unprepared, and 22-24 rarely or never were unprepared.

Teacher F recorded that in one group of 15, none regularly came unprepared, two occasionally came unprepared, and 13 rarely or never were unprepared.

Teacher A reported that of the 63 students being observed, one regularly did an incomplete job on assignments or did not follow instructions, four occasionally did an incomplete job on their assignments or did not follow instructions, and 58 rarely did an incomplete job or did not follow instructions.

Teacher B reported that of this number, five to seven regularly did an incomplete job or did not follow instructions, four occasionally did an incomplete job or did not follow instructions, and 55-56 rarely did an incomplete job or did not follow instructions.

Teacher C recorded one of the same group regularly doing an incomplete job on assignments or not following instructions, five to seven occasionally having the same problem, and 59-60 rarely having any problem.

Teacher D stated that of 63 students, 11 regularly, 11 occasionally, and 41 rarely did an incomplete job or did not follow instruction.

Teacher E wrote that of 34 students, eight regularly, eight to ten occasionally, and 23-24 rarely did an incomplete job or did not follow instructions.

Teacher F documented that of 15 students, two regularly, three occasionally, and 10 rarely failed to do a complete job or follow instructions.

Teacher A reported that on the average, the 29 seventh graders asked for any one assignment to be repeated three times after affirming that they understood and had written down instructions, and each eighth grade group asked for the assignment to be repeated one more time.

Teacher B responded that the seventh grade class usually asked for the assignment to be repeated three times after being instructed to write it down, and each eighth grade group asked for it two more times.

Teacher C recorded that students did not ask for repeats.

Teacher D wrote that classes asked for repeats two times.

Teacher E said all her classes asked for repeats two times.

Teacher F responded that the question was not applicable as Teacher F teaches shop and shows procedures step-by-step throughout the class period.

The second section of the questionnaire asked teachers to list, in order of frequency, the excuses they heard most often. The results were as follows.

The most frequently listed excuse was, "I forgot."

"I didn't have time was listed as the next frequently used excuse." Those who didn't put it as the second most frequently used excuse, listed it as third from the top.

Fourth place was, "I left it home."

The excuse used fifth down the line was, "I didn't feel well."

Teachers put, "I thought it was due tomorrow (or another time)" in sixth place.

The seventh most frequently used according to questionnaire sheets was, "I didn't write it down."

The eighth most often heard excuse was, "I couldn't find any paper, pencil, etc."

Ninth place according to the sheets turned in was, "My mom (or another person) made me go to bed."

Teachers said that another excuse not on the list was at the bottom of the frequency list, but they did not list that excuse.

Causative Analysis

The evidence suggested that the basis of the problem lay in the students' attitudes and habits. The students appeared to hope they could remember assignments without asking for repeats, but would rather ask for the repeats than take the trouble to write directions. The writer based this conclusion on the fact that students who asked for a repeat of an assignment already given, often asked for this repeat without a pencil or paper in their hands on which to write the information. When she directed them to write it, they went to their seats, returned with paper and pencil, and asked for still another repeat.

Students came to class unprepared because they were not organized. The excuses recorded in the previous section support this conclusion, especially, "I didn't write it down," "I thought it was due tomorrow (or another time)," and " I couldn't find any paper, pencil, etc."

Students did not pay attention to what the teacher told them; they seemed to feel that it would be easier just to ask for the information again. The excuse recorded that supports this conclusion is, " I didn't know how to do it," after affirming in class that they understood.

Students did a poor job because they did not put out the necessary effort to keep assignments recorded. They did not spend enough time on the assignments to do a thorough job, to proofread and correct, and sometimes even to finish all the exercises. The writer reached this conclusion after hearing from the students, "I forgot," and "I didn't have time" numerous times.

Students did a poor job because they had lost the directions and so got them again at the last minute necessitating their hurrying through the work in an effort to have the material finished on time. The excuse given supporting this conclusion was, "I left the directions at home."

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

According to Newmann, students are obviously not motivated to get into their work (1989). Curtis also reports lack of student motivation as a key problem in learning (1992). Our society does not encourage students to view learning as their top priority, or even one of their top priorities. Bishop writes that American students

spend only about half of their in-school time involved in active learning. He is disturbed by the apathy among parents and school board members for quality of education and by the elevated place of athletics over academics in our schools and in society in general. He continues to write that not only do students' peers discourage academic achievement, but he contends that potential employers and selective colleges do not encourage it (1989). His reasoning is that the colleges and employers rely more on test results than on evidence of student achievement. Students know this and lose incentive to try.

Alderman lists four reasons for success or failure. He believes students attribute success or failure to lack of ability, to the task being too difficult (when they perform poorly), or to luck (when they do well on assignments). He also writes that they do not put out the necessary effort to get the job done well, and they are not responsible enough to take on a "hard task" with an attitude of sticking to it until it is completed (1990).

This writer has observed that junior high students appear to be very impatient as evidenced by the short amount of time they willingly spend on any one activity in which they are not really interested. They are not motivated to take the time to do a good job on things that they do not perceive as fun or unless there is something in it for them, a tangible reward of some kind as advocated by Pross (1989) or the internal stimulation promoted by Lockavitch (1986). They are not motivated by focusing on a goal as advocated by Griffin (1989).

Students had not shown evidence of being organized. Ornstein & Hunkins spend a lot of time discussing organization for educators (1993). If adult educators need so much help in organizing, it is understandable that inexperienced adolescents would have a problem with it. This writer often spends as much time trying to get students to get their work organized as she spends giving them information.

Students have not always been held accountable, and unless there is accountability, there will not be maximum student effort. According to Slavin, even in cooperative learning groups, when students are not held individually accountable, they are not going to perform as well (1988).

Summary

Junior high students at the practicum school had not taken ownership of their own learning largely because they had not been responsible in organizing and keeping track of their work. Teachers at the practicum school have agreed that lack of student responsibility has played a large part in this problem, and these teachers agreed on a number of frequently used excuses that appear to support the existence of this view.

A number of prominent educators, such as Bishop, accuse society of discouraging students from achieving, even to the point of downplaying such achievement (1989). However, other more positive writers, including Slavin, believe the situation can be improved if teachers will insist on individual accountability (1988).

CHAPTER III: Anticipated Outcomes

Goals and Expectations

The writer expected students to improve in keeping track of their assignment directions after the practicum implementation. She expected that they would not continue to repeatedly ask the same questions. They would complete their assignments on time, bring them to class on time, proofreading and studying until they had done their best or had achieved mastery.

The writer expected students to use their in-school time wisely, not wasting class time playing or trying to get out of work. She expected them to try for mastery and completion of work rather than hurrying on to other activities just for fun. She expected that doing one's best would become an important concept to each student, and the idea of being lucky or not lucky would fade away as students gained a feeling of control.

The writer expected learning to become its own reward as pupils saw their progress. She expected them to accept accountability as part of the process and welcome the opportunity to be apprised of their progress so they could decide on their next set of goals. She expected them to be their own hardest critics, always looking for ways to improve.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum.

1. Of the students in the three groups totaling 63, the number of students who wrote down assignments and directions would not remain at 20 as it was when initial

observations were made; all but 10 (a total of 53) would write down assignments and directions for their completion, and would organize materials in such a way that they would not lose assignment directions or the assignments themselves. These students would have the assignment directions with them at school so that they could work on them when time permitted. Knowing that they would be responsible for justifying their grades to their parents by showing the completed assignments would encourage students to get their work organized and keep it organized.

2. In the same group of students, the writer expected that at least 53 instead of the current 40 would come to class prepared with finished assignments that they had completed to the best of their ability. When appropriate, they would be able to demonstrate a difference in original and final work showing that they had proofread and corrected their assignments.

3. Because students would be in the process of becoming more responsible, they would make fewer excuses. Frequency of excuses for not completing work would diminish to no more than five per week for 29 seventh graders, and no more than five per week for 34 eighth graders that make up the current classes. Because students would have less need to make excuses, the writer expected kinds of excuses to dwindle to no more than five for each grade level rather than the current 10 or more.

Assessment Procedures

1. With the help of the students, the writer examined students' assignment calendars to determine which students were keeping these records accurately and completely (see Appendix C).

2. Students kept records of assignments prepared, edited, proofread, and revised (see Appendix D). A grade of 93% or higher resulted in an "A," 85%-92% in a "B," 75%-84% in a "C," and 70%-74% in a "D." The writer checked these students' records periodically.

3. Finally, during November and December, the writer kept a record of frequency and kinds of student excuses for not completing work correctly (see Appendices E & F) Students offered fewer excuses as they became more responsible; many of them did not need to offer creative reasons for not getting work in because they had completed all work.

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

The writer used a log sheet to record a description of any unexpected event, the reason for the occurrence (if that were possible to determine), a description of how the situation was handled, a description of the result, the measures taken to prevent its recurrence (if the event were negative), positive outcomes (if the event were positive) and possible changes to project as a result of the event (see Appendix G).

During the time evidence was being collected for this proposal, the biggest problem that the writer encountered was trying to get all the questions written down. Her first solution was to ask students to write questions and then ask them, thereby providing the writer with a record.

Some students were very willing to do this, some forgot, sometimes the writer forgot, and some of the students seemed intimidated by the process, even though the

writer assured them that she was not keeping names, only questions, and that the record had nothing to do with grades.

The result was that the writer continued to ask the bolder students to write (she had been with them long enough by that time to determine who they were) and she recorded the rest herself. A few questions were undoubtedly lost, but not many. With practicum implementation, the number of questions diminished to a number that could be more manageably recorded, so it was no longer necessary for students to write their questions. The writer probably lost some questions during implementation, not because of their number, but because everyone, including the teacher, became so comfortable with the situation that she forgot to write them down.

CHAPTER IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that junior high students (grades seven and eight) at the practicum school had not taken ownership of their own learning. There was little evidence that they felt responsible for their education or that their interest in doing a good job took up much of their thinking. The evidence that they considered learning as a valuable preparation for their future was not impressive.

Discussion

Choices.

One way to help get students involved is to make them feel that their views will be considered, to hold them accountable for their influence, and to give them choices about how they will accomplish their goals. Strom states that students want recognition for what they do, and they want their ideas respected. If teachers give them some choices in the achievement of their goals, it is a way of showing respect for their ability to make valid decisions (1992). Newmann agrees that students must be engaged in their own work in order to get the full benefit of their education. He explains that for them, to have some influence gives them a sense of ownership, and for teachers to respond positively to them builds that feeling (1989).

Tock takes things even further by advocating that students have a choice not only in picking classes and course material, but also in selecting their schools. He cites magnet schools to prove his point and says that their success is due in great measure to the pride felt by the students in their choice (1991). Robinson extends the concept

to teachers, advocating that both educators and students will enjoy and benefit one another and the learning process if they feel the freedom that choice brings (1994).

Leadership.

Benenson & Steinbeck advise that teachers, parents, and students can share ownership by working on and trying to solve problems as a team. When they all respond to needs together, the students will gain the enthusiasm to learn and care about what happens in the world around them (1994).

Webb and Sherman believe that schools should promote closer relations between family members (1989). Schools that take on this responsibility recognize that the most visible and outstanding teachers in a child's life are the parents. These parents will be active school advocates and supporters, or they will be apathetic or even antagonistic toward the school. On numerous occasions in this writer's experience, keeping parents informed and involved in their child's school has brought about a parent-teacher relationship resulting in a student's work improvement.

French's research was with a program called Foxfire. He recommends student involvement in every part of the program. He says that the teacher should be leader, not boss; and everyone involved must learn to expect errors and benefit from them. French also emphasizes that experiences and activities must reflect "academic integrity." Teachers must guide students to use their imaginations in solving problems and in exercising honest evaluation to determine success (1992).

There are generally pitfalls in even good methods, and since openness is the norm in progressive classroom situations, the forceful student can "take over" if the teacher

is not careful with everyone's rights. Lardino-Harding reports success in exercising democratic principles with the learning circle concept (1994). To use this method, teachers put everyone in a circle, and a child leads a discussion. Each person speaks only once (when recognized by the leader), and no one is allowed to interrupt. When everybody who wants a voice has been heard, the second round is conducted by the leader. This time, each can once again contribute, relating what he or she has learned. The value of circle learning is in the opportunity for everyone to share and value all opinions.

Sullivan talks about an option that deals with non-traditional situations. She reports that counselors meet with small groups of students who need to raise their grades. Together they decide on ways to do this. When all have come to an agreement, the students sign contracts and the counselor promises rewards. Teachers conduct the ensuing sessions; they have their choice of students, and students have their choice of accepting or rejecting a place in the group. Sullivan says that these special study clusters, based on everyone's preference, have had a very positive impact on student motivation (1988). Of course, everyone's choices can not be honored if, for example, a teacher prefers not to have a student who wants that teacher's assistance.

Empowerment.

People who have been given decision rights are empowered. Oldfather believes that among other things, those who experience empowerment feel that they can synthesize ideas, make judgments, and develop opinions (1992). Ukpokodu defines helping people acquire empowerment as helping them gain the values, attitudes, skills, and

knowledge needed to make sure that justice prevails for all. She explains that people, especially people in a diverse society, need to develop the ability to stand up for themselves and others when the situation calls for it. In so doing, they empower themselves and inspire others to do the same (1994). Keedy views empowerment as teachers and students making joint decisions about material and evaluation, and he believes that students should have influence over the entire process (1991).

The logical goal of educators in turning over the reins to the next generation involves helping them acquire the maturity that comes with the territory. According to Griffin, when students gain power, the result must be that they also assume responsibility. He believes that gaining responsibility will be a consequence of gaining power (1989).

To facilitate student empowerment, Kohn offers four major areas for consideration in their acquisition of this important commodity. These areas are (a) goals and direction, (b) climate, (c) control, and (d) the learning process (1991).

In Keedy's research on the school without walls, he discusses teachers brainstorming with students and coming away with student question lists. Students choose five ideas for each proposed question, and staff members come up with courses that will meet the proposed needs. After the staff writes and modifies the course descriptions, parents and students make decisions, and the school notifies the students of class assignments. In September, students and teachers again modify the class plans before proceeding (1991).

Student-Led Conferences

One kind of empowerment advocated by Austin involves student-led parent conferences (1994). Austin believes that students' self confidence is improved and their relationship with their parents is strengthened when these students prepare for and conduct conferences with their parents. Denby (1996) adds motivation and increased parent-child communication to the positives that result from student-led conferences. The writer believes that the practice helps students gain understanding of their work resulting in academic improvement. Student-led conferences also promote ownership as students take over and report their schoolwork and the resulting grades.

Student Motivation

All these programs to empower students are attempts, some very successful attempts, at motivation. The teacher who can get his or her students to want to learn is indeed a successful leader.

Johnson believes that the way for the teacher to inspire students to achieve excellence through ownership is to model a desired quality and to convince students that this quality can be theirs. The teacher who convinces students to claim desired goals as a group gives "team ownership" to all who are involved. Such an attitude motivates everyone and gives each student the willingness to take the responsibility to achieve (1991).

Ames is convinced that students must become really committed in order to achieve anything close to mastery of their studies. They must learn to value effort as opposed to doing things in a haphazard manner. Therefore, teachers have to enhance their

curiosity and desire for achievement (1992). Ames suggests that teachers must design tasks in such a way that students will think they are valuable, if possible in the immediate future, and certainly in the long run. If students have a choice of methods they may use to reach their goals, they will be more likely than not to choose some method and get involved in working out whatever problem is before them. Once students get involved in the process of learning and feel even a small sense of accomplishment, they will want more, and they will continue to work.

Sometimes, convincing young people that their efforts can and will make a difference is more than a challenge. Brophy (1987) writes that teachers who inspire this attitude in students are active, socialization agents; they lead students to interact with their surroundings (including the other people in those surroundings) and the students learn from the relationships that they form. He offers a number of ways for getting students motivated. An abbreviated list follows:

First, teachers need to communicate to students what is expected and why. Next, teachers must make students feel comfortable with the task at hand; they should help students choose those activities that are meaningful and appropriate. Finally, teachers need to guide students to understand what to do, and show them why the task is important enough for them to put forth effort.

Brophy emphasizes that the educator's role is one of positive support. He counsels teachers to help students feel comfortable even when taking risks; he believes that with encouragement, they will be more apt to take reasonable risks and so learn more. His second piece of advice is to provide tasks that are at appropriate levels of difficulty so

that students will be neither frustrated nor bored with their work. He says to concentrate on achieving success rather than avoiding failure and to make sure that students achieve at least some measure of success. He advocates rewards (such as prizes, special privileges, special recognition and opportunities to go places with the teacher) and positive competition and feedback (1987).

Lockavitch states that teachers who show tolerance, demonstrate understanding, give clear directions, have high expectations, give encouragement, assign appropriate tasks, and give appropriate stimulation are successful at motivating students (1986). Pross's ideas of appropriate stimulation include extrinsic rewards such as (a) the teacher's sending positive notes to parents, (b) the students' taking turns at being teacher or being principal assistant, (c) cooking in the classroom, (d) making a video, (e) tutoring younger children, (f) having a theme day, or (g) choosing where they want to sit (1989).

Barnes advises teachers to establish positive relationships and promote positive self image as early as possible, to solve problems and misunderstandings quickly, to make learning interesting and fun, and to keep students up-to-date on their progress (1988).

One opinion is that teachers are at least sometimes to blame for the lack of motivation, knowledge, and enthusiasm that learners experience. To promote curiosity and interest, Curtis suggests creating a bulletin board with students' questions, summarized information about the questions, and names of those who gathered the material (1992). She also advocates that students act as consultants to others who need extra help.

Voice

"Voice" and "honored voice" are terms that frequently occurred throughout the literature investigated for this practicum. Johnson defines voice as feedback and writes that nearly everything students say or do is feedback (1991). Oldfather speaks of honored voice as referring to students being listened to and responded to, and their opinions and feelings being honored. By honoring the voices of the students, the teacher shares ownership of knowing with them (1992). Valencia says ownership refers to students' attitudes about literacy and their habits in their use of literacy (1990). For example, very young students begin to read a few pages each day without being reminded constantly; they may make lists of things they need to do or articles they need to keep track of.

Literacy Ownership

In his study of ownership, Kennedy offers various kinds that are valuable avenues for study. His lists include curriculum assessment ownership, language assessment ownership, learning styles ownership, and classroom governance (1994).

This writer has a close friend who has, as one of his favorite quips, "The man who doesn't read is no better off than the man who can't read." Valencia writes that the problem often is that learners can write, but they choose not to. Her solution is to make student ownership of literacy one of the curriculum goals (1990).

Goal Setting

Griffin counsels that it is the crucial task of instructors to teach students to set their own goals, progress toward them, recognize their ability to reach them, and reinforce

the learning achieved in their effort. When the students' perceptions change, they will feel more in control of their academics; they will own them (1989). As a result of this study, Griffin permits students to grade their own papers, record their own grades, and average them weekly, thus encouraging students to own responsibility and trustworthiness.

Accountability.

Lynch advises demanding accountability. He says that one way for teachers to accomplish their goal of having students assume responsibility for their own work is for the teacher to save students' early work and then return it when they show improvement; doing this will show the students that effort produces success (1990).

Values.

Voltz & Damiano-Lantz's strategies are to link the subject matter to what learners think is important. He advocates using a thematic approach in which students are interested, a multicultural approach, diversification, and student-set goals (1993). In addition, Voltz & Damiano-Lantz, suggest asking for student input in the room arrangement and organization, and giving students a voice in classroom management.

Demonstration.

As students take more ownership of their learning, they become responsible and transfer their attitudes of ownership and responsibility from the classroom to more areas of their lives. The desired outcome is that each student will become a valuable, dependable member of the adult society when his or her time comes to take a place in that society.

Spady presents a very interesting concept called the "demonstration mountain." Outcomes, he says, are demonstrations of learning. Demonstration must exhibit high quality, occur at the culminating point of learning, and occur in a performance setting. The demonstration mountain involves climbing from basic classroom learning to real-world challenges. As learners move up the mountain, the ownership, self-direction, and self-assessment increases (1994).

At the bottom of the mountain is the least complex form, the traditional zone; midway up is a transitional zone where demonstration requires some integration and synthesis of material. Interdisciplinary approaches apply here. At the highest level is the transformational zone. This is where the highest degrees of ownership, integration, and synthesis are correlated, where prior learning must be applied, and where performers respond to the complexities of real life. At the top, people continuously carry out their responsibilities (1994).

Portfolios.

Evans reports success with using student portfolios in her teaching (1993). She believes that when several teachers meet to work out a student's academic problems, those teachers can accomplish a great deal by examining and discussing the material in the student's portfolio. Students' original essays are particularly helpful to those endeavoring to discover solutions to learning problems. Evans relates some of her experiences in which a team of teachers examined the original work of some of the students. These were teachers who had had no personal contact with the students

whose portfolios they were examining. From that work, they were able to point out students' problems that Evans had been unable to see.

Some educators promote the portfolio as an excellent organizing device. Frazier and Paulson list student responsibilities in this process as (a) setting goals, (b) selecting pieces, and (c) reflecting on their work (1992). They write that the greatest value of portfolios is in the self-evaluation that students go through while keeping the portfolios. According to these educators, the portfolio is suggested as much more than an organizational tool; the process encourages ownership, pride and high self-esteem (1992).

Griffin lists records of previous and current activities, objectives, dates, and grades as appropriate items to be kept in portfolios (1989). Frazier and Paulsen say that almost anything can be kept inside as long as students use the materials for evaluation. Teachers can also bring portfolios into play for providing feedback, monitoring progress, and giving progress reports to parents.

Frazier and Paulsen include a negative view commenting that while many educators see portfolios as great vehicles for encouraging student self-assessment, some believe that falling back on them in this way can destroy their value as teaching tools; the concern is that teachers will use the portfolios to impose external assessment that will limit student freedom and stifle empowerment.

One very interesting version of portfolio documentation described by Hetterscheidt, Pott, Russell, and Tchang involves computers. In the project that they conducted, participants recorded students' voices as they read into the computer and then saved

the readings along with student evaluations. Before and after students listened to the playback, they and their teachers discussed how well they thought they were doing and where they could improve. Recording the students' evaluations gave them a grasp of ownership that they might not otherwise have had (1992).

Description of Selected Solutions

Portfolios

Of the research conducted and outlined in the previous paragraphs, this writer has been most interested in portfolios. The plan was for students to organize records and assignments in well-kept, student portfolios so they could see for themselves how much progress they were making not only in academic achievement, but also in responsibility, as evidenced by the number of items they had kept in their files during the course of the practicum.

The writer had observed that students often were quick to throw away poorly done papers. If these students could learn to evaluate these papers, it was this writer's position that their work would improve. According to Austin, students who become involved in evaluation, usually learn to see things realistically and improve in their work (1994).

Assignment Calendars

Calendars for keeping track of assignments and completed work also appeared to be a good idea. As one strategy for motivating students, Matthews, Roquemore, Franks, Mahaffey, Melnick, Osborn, Ramos, and Royal cite teacher-prepared

calendars showing dates for various items such as schedules of class activities, homework assignments, tests, and papers (1992).

The writer's plans were to alter this concept and shift the responsibility of keeping track of important dates to the students. The writer made assignments and gave due dates with instructions that the dates be recorded on student calendars. Students would then be responsible for taking care of the calendars (see Appendix C).

Student-Conducted Conferences.

Since students who organize their work with calendars and portfolios would have access to the records necessary to understand the grades that resulted from the work, it follows that those students would be in a position to defend or explain their efforts. Webb and Sherman do not discuss parent conferences *per se*, but they do advocate interaction between parent and child. They believe that the school should encourage parents and children to interact with each other as much as possible (1989).

Some educators who have used student-led parent conferences with success highly recommend them. According to Austin, the student's role is to "initiate, lead, and explain" using portfolio contents to demonstrate points (1994). If parents are interested and supportive of the child's efforts, the conference could be a further motivating force in the life of the student. This writer agrees with Austin that a good way to motivate students and increase communication between parent and child would be to have the students conduct parent conferences. With positive parent reactions, students gain in self esteem as well as in understanding of their work. The practice also promotes ownership as students take over and report what they think important.

Evaluation Criteria

The goals of the practicum were as follows:

1. Students would decide on the grade they wanted to earn for the grading period during which the practicum would be conducted. They subsequently would decide on the amount of time they were willing to work on assignment preparation, on discussion with the teacher previous to the day assignments were due, and on time spent to make up, revise, or re-do assignments on which they had not earned a satisfactory grade.

2. Students would keep records of their completed assignments including directions for completion and due dates.

3. Students would come to class prepared with completed assignments on which they had spent enough time to meet their goals and they would do it more frequently than they had before the practicum.

4. Students would correct or revise work on which they had earned a grade of 75% or lower. Students who chose to earn letter grades higher than "C," would correct work on which they earned grades between 75% and 92%.

Causal Analysis

1. Students came to class unprepared because they were not organized or not motivated.

2. Students did a poor job on their assignments because they did not put enough time and effort into them.

3. Students lost assignments and had to hurry through doing them a second time to get them to class before they were late. They lost the directions telling them how to proceed, and as a result, they made up their own rules as they completed the work.

4. Students did not proofread and correct work, and they did not study for mastery because they saw themselves as lacking ability; they thus thought that hard work was of no use, and they did not give themselves enough time to finish their assignments.

Preparation for Writing Proposal

Evidence gathered by this writer was collected by personal observation and recording of those observations, and by asking other junior high teachers to complete a questionnaire. The writer also conducted a surprise check of students to determine whether or not they were keeping written assignment directions.

Permission for Implementation

This writer's immediate supervisor is the junior high-high school principal. He gave permission and showed considerable support for the project. The maintenance coordinator moved a four-drawer file cabinet into the practicum classroom in which students kept their portfolios. The writer purchased file folders for each student and encouraged all to individualize them with their own personal decorations.

The superintendent of the practicum school also voiced support and approval, and asked to be kept informed of the writer's progress.

The writer met with parents explaining the objectives and plan for the practicum after the proposal was approved. Parents were kept updated at parent meetings and

during numerous impromptu meetings. One parent came in to examine his son's portfolio, and others dropped by frequently to ask questions or make comments.

Report of Action Taken

During the first week, the writer spent the greater part of one class period with each of the eighth grade classes and one with the seventh grade class explaining portfolios and assignment calendars. The writer instructed her students to keep all assignments, original through final copies, to keep assignment calendar sheets complete with instructions and grades, and to plan goals for the grading period. Also during that week, the writer spoke with the parents during parent-teacher conferences, describing the practicum plan and inviting parental involvement and questions. The writer gave each student's parent a flier as a combination visual aid-project reminder (see Appendix H).

The first problem that we encountered was one of organization. The writer had not thought through the problem of students having the contents of their folder with them at the right time. One of the seventh graders pointed out that the writer had instructed students to leave everything in the file cabinet at one point, and then at a later point, expected them to have what they needed at their desks. Writer and students discussed this and revised things allowing students to keep certain materials in their notebooks.

Students found a problem using the assignment calendar sheets as the writer had designed them (see Appendix C). Most students decided that it would be easier and more practical to cut the sheets so that a single assignment would appear on a half sheet of paper. Some students wanted to keep each assignment calendar sheet with the

actual finished assignment; some wanted to keep assignment calendar sheets together by subject; and still others preferred to keep the calendar sheets together in chronological order. Some decided to keep the original full sheet and figure out their own arrangement. Each was allowed to arrange the assignment calendar sheets the way he or she wanted.

The writer provided each student with a new folder, and each student put some personal identification on his or her portfolio. Some put only their name while others decorated with flowers, cartoon characters or various codes.

During the second week, the writer set out to examine the contents of the portfolios. After looking at only four, she determined that the time required to do this made it impossible to complete the task as planned. She subsequently enlisted the aid of the students themselves. They exchanged folders, the writer told them what to look for, and they checked each others' work. Students who checked incomplete folders pointed out the holes to the owners and everyone reported the results to the teacher. Students were awarded points (see Appendix I) for the entries in their folders.

Students checked one another's folders the third week, as previously planned, giving each other feedback. After their sessions with one another, each wrote two or three paragraphs about the help he or she received. The writer gave a composition grade to the person writing the material, and awarded practicum points to the one who provided the help and advice.

During the third week, students chose partners and looked at each other's portfolios. Each time students worked together, they chose partners that they had not

had before. Most gave his or her partner positive suggestions and encouragement about the examined folder. Following this, each student wrote a paragraph about the person who checked his or her work.

During the fourth week, students completed their goal sheets (see Appendix J) determining the grades they would strive for and the amount of time they were willing to spend on each subject to achieve these goals.

A parent-teacher meeting was on the calendar for the fifth week, and the writer asked the principal's permission to address the parents for the purpose of giving then an update on the practicum progress. Permission was granted, and the writer gave a short report to the parents bringing them up-to-date. She told them about the time problem encountered the first time she had scheduled checking the portfolios and the problem with the assignment calendars. She also related the encouraging spirit of help and cooperation that she sensed was developing between partners as they checked one another's entries and encouraged each other.

The writer assigned students to write one to three paragraphs describing and giving their point-of-view about their own portfolios during the sixth week, and they again checked each other's work in the course of the seventh week. Having completed that, each wrote one paragraph about the help given by the friend and one paragraph about his or her own progress.

Preparation for parent conferences began the eighth week. The class discussed what points should be covered at the conferences, what materials would be needed for

the conferences, and what procedures might be followed to get the best use from the time available to us.

The ninth week, students again evaluated their own portfolios. They also outlined their plans for conducting their parent conferences and listed what they felt they still needed from the writer.

During the tenth week, the class discussed the conferences bringing up concerns and perceived needs. Each student presented his or her material to the writer in a role play situation.

Students conducted their own conferences during the eleventh week; they presented their grades to their parents and explained the reasons for each, showing completed assignments and assignment calendar sheets as justification. A special room opening off the auditorium (where the conferences were being held) was provided for practicum participants so that they could continue their conversations with their parents if the conferences ran longer than they had anticipated.

Ordinarily, all teachers meet individually with all students and parents. During this time, grades are given, strengths and weaknesses briefly discussed, and plans made for subsequent conference times with those who need it.

During the conferences, parents and students became so involved that the writer took other parents and children into the extra room to discuss their work, leaving those already talking at the conference table.

During the twelfth week, the writer gave her observations and impressions of the practicum results to the principal and discussed the results with him and with the students. She also prepared a report for each parent which she presented to those who attended the monthly parent-teacher-fellowship meeting in February. The report included practicum results and discussions.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The problem to be solved in this practicum was that junior high students (grades seven and eight) at the practicum school had not taken ownership of their own learning. They did not write down assignments and directions as the teachers gave them; they lost their instructions, even if they had written them initially, and they subsequently forgot what they were supposed to do. Those who constantly lagged behind did not turn in assigned work when it was due or did not redo work that they had failed to do correctly in the first place.

The writer's plan was for students to organize records and assignments in well-kept, student portfolios so they could see for themselves how much progress they were making.

This writer had observed that students often were quick to throw away poorly done papers. If these students could learn to evaluate these papers, it was this writer's position that their work would improve. According to Austin, students who become involved in evaluation, usually learn to see things realistically and improve in their work (1994). Calendars for keeping track of assignments and completed work also appeared to be a good idea. The writer planned to make assignments and give due dates with instructions that the dates be recorded on student calendars. Students would then be responsible for taking care of the calendars.

The following outcomes were projected for the practicum:

1. Of the students in the three groups totaling 63, the number of students who write down assignments and directions will not remain at 20 as it was when initial observations were made; all but 10 (a total of 53) will write down assignments and directions for their completion, and will organize materials in such a way that they will not lose assignment directions or the assignments themselves. These students will have the assignment directions with them while they are at school so that they can work on them when time permits. Knowing that they will be responsible for justifying their grades to their parents by showing the completed assignments will encourage students to get their work organized and keep it organized.

This outcome was not met. Of the 63 students who began the practicum in November, one left the school, 45 wrote all assignments on their assignment calendars and kept their papers in their portfolios all or almost all of the time; 17 students kept assignments written on assignment calendars and kept their papers in their portfolios only part of the time (see Appendix K). The writer decided to use three bar charts and one pie chart to illustrate her results because these depicted the results much more clearly than the line graphs originally planned.

2. In the same group of students, at least 53 will come to class prepared with assignments that are finished and that they have completed to the best of their ability instead of the current 40. When appropriate, they will be able to demonstrate a difference in original work and the final copies that will show that they have proofread and corrected their work.

This outcome was not met. During the last three weeks of the practicum, 44 of the 62 students who finished the practicum with their classmates turned in every assignment on time and corrected all papers that were not well done while 18 failed to turn in or correct one or more poorly done papers (see Appendix L).

3. Because students will be in the process of becoming more responsible, they will feel the need for fewer excuses and so will make fewer excuses. Frequency of excuses for not completely work will diminish to no more than five per week for 29 seventh graders, and no more than five per week for 34 eighth graders that make up the current classes. Because students will have less need to make excuses, kinds of excuses will dwindle to no more than five for each grade level rather than the current 10 or more.

This outcome was met. During the entire month of December, seventh graders made excuses for incomplete work only six times (1.5 per week) and eighth graders made such excuses only five times (1.25 per week). As parent conferences approached in January, seventh grade students gave only three excuses (.75 per week) and eighth graders gave only two excuses (.5 per week) (see Appendix M). Students threw themselves into activities of the practicum, and kinds of excuses dropped to the following:

- I forgot
- I left it home
- It's in my locker
- I didn't know what to do

- You didn't tell me about it

Discussion

Students appeared gradually to realize that excuses would not be accepted. When they got themselves organized and saw improvement, they gave evidence that they enjoyed the feeling and wanted to continue to improve. Among the written remarks that students made about their portfolios during the course of the practicum were the following:

"I have a little trouble with remembering to write the assignments down. Other than that, I'm doing okay."

"The English category has so many parts, it's hard to keep track of them. The portfolio is very helpful to keep track of our assignments; it's just very difficult to do, but it does help."

"It's hard to remember to 'wright' down stuff, but it is getting easier."

"We should have portfolios in every class. Sometimes writing in the portfolio every day can get annoying, but overall I think it is a pretty good idea and I think you should continue with it throughout the years. Especially if people are getting better grades."

"The grade sheet is a big help and it 'let's' me know how I'm doing. My papers are neatly organized, and I have all the assignments written on my assignment calendar with the due date and directions. Also, I like drawing on the cover of my portfolio."

"I think my portfolio is coming alone just fine. It isn't as good as it could be but I can find everything if I need it."

"I think so far I'm doing pretty 'good.' The portfolio is really helping me, and it shows. I haven't had one 'irrie' (irresponsibility mark) this year."

"My folder is way behind on assignments. Some of it is my fault. Some of it 'is'nt'. The part that was my fault is because I ' have'nt' been doing my job. The part that 'is'nt' my fault is because I've been sick. I need to ask you or somebody in the class for help."

"I think this portfolio thing is a real good idea because you always have it when you want it and it's easy to get to when you need it. It's also good because then you won't forget your paper at home or lose it."

"It is a very helpful procedure. It teaches you responsibility, and neatness."

"I am missing a lot of things so I will come in one lunch time and get caught up. Portfolios aren't as wild an idea as I thought. I am learning a lot."

"So far the portfolio idea has been O.K. but I would rather write my assignments down elsewhere and not on calendars."

"Mike told me that I should keep all of my assignment calendars in my portfolio. He also told me to keep all of my papers in order as we do them. Mike said that I should take any 'unnessary' papers out."

"I don't really like this project because I'm not very responsible, but I'll manage."

"Personally, I think that all of this is a waste of time and thought; it's just 1 more thing to worry about that's not needed. It's a good idea, but I think it should be optional."

"I'm just not into the swing of things yet. I'm really glad we started this. I think this is an O.K. program."

"This thing that you're doing with us (portfolios) is really starting to organize me more and help me more."

This writer agrees with Dodd's recommendation that students work together and help each other (1995). Student collaboration turned out to be a very important part of this practicum and is one of the things that this writer plans to continue.

Denby (1996) reports a parent's view that the conferences led by students, strengthen the child-student-teacher relationship. His experience was with students in grades two through five. He writes that some parents found it difficult to accept their child's evaluations, but he listed his project as mostly successful. This writer's school parents all accepted their children's evaluation. Even the boy who appeared to be making no progress was honest in his brief self-evaluation.

One of the three outcomes was met, the other two were not. The unanticipated improvement in student relationships seemed so pronounced that the writer was surprised when she realized that the other two outcomes had not been met. This writer must conclude that the unanticipated outcomes now appear to be much more important than those originally planned.

This writer observed many good things going on among her students during the practicum implementation. The relationships that this writer observed being formed and those that were strengthened as a result of collaboration during the practicum

were especially rewarding as was the interaction between parents and students during the conferences.

More than twice as many students' grades rose as fell during the practicum implementation (see Appendix N). This writer's observation is that learning has taken place as evidenced by this improvement in grades, and the observed attitudes seem to indicate that the classroom in which this is happening is a pleasant, productive place in which social skills are also being learned and sharpened.

The expectations were set very high. Many students managed to fulfill all requirements set up by this writer. All but five appeared to try very hard and appeared to improve as a result. Of these five, two showed improvement immediately, but not as much as their classmates. Another began to move forward with the others later in the program. Two lagged behind, and one of those finally began to pick up speed. This cannot be solely attributed to the practicum as this writer instituted many restrictions to get him moving including no play time during lunch recess until this work was caught up. She put the last holdout under the same restrictions, gave him a great deal of extra time and encouragement, assigned a student helper, and had two very frank conferences with his mother but so far, nothing has yielded any noticeable results.

The writer is pleased with the results of all student efforts but this one; if she were to run the same practicum again, one of the things she would do would be change the expected outcomes. She would not expect all students to keep everything they were asked to keep. Instead, she would expect most students to keep more materials than

they had kept previous to practicum implementation, and she would expect most of the grades to improve as students took ownership and gained responsibility.

Students checking each other's work was planned but not to the extent that this writer ultimately implemented it. As the students looked over each other's calendars and portfolios, the writer instructed them to help one another by pointing out ways that the work could be improved. The writer then gave points to the helper (see Appendix I) as planned. She could see right away that students' responses were totally positive. Here are a few responses that this writer copied from the student papers describing planned improvements to their portfolios or evaluations of those portfolios.

"Rachelle helped me feel better about this project. I started to feel that I was doing it all wrong. Rachelle helped me see that I was doing just fine. She said she thought I was very organized. She also said that she liked my idea. (That made me feel good) She is a very good friend."

"Don is my helper. He has helped me a lot. I missed a couple of grades and he told me about them and now I have them all written down in my portfolio. Don is a very good helper. If I miss anything, Don gives it to me." Don is a very shy boy who has never volunteered much of anything before.

"Matt helped me by checking to see if everything was in the right place. He also checked to see if I had everything 'writen' down like my 'asingment' and reading pages. He took the time to make sure it was 'alright.' I think Matt did very well. He is a good checker." Matt has previously been reluctant to get involved in classroom activities.

One seventh grader, an LD student, asked to be seated next to her special friend so she might get more help. An eighth grader, who has trouble both making grades and making friends, was befriended by a fellow eighth grade girl (who seemed to be her only friend for a while). During the final week she asked for another of the eighth grade girls to ride with her in her mother's car as we all went on a planned field trip. This seems like slow progress, but this writer is happy with a gain of two friends over the no friends that she seemed to have in that class at the beginning of the year.

In her proposal, the writer did not emphasize that grades would go up. She did expect this to a small degree but not to the extent that it occurred (see Appendix N).

Students demonstrated as much of a desire to help their friends make progress as they demonstrated an interest in their own progress. This writer made it very clear that keeping the portfolio would not affect grades, so that could not have been the motive. Many students remarked or wrote that the conferences sounded like fun.

"I think this project is going great so far. I can hardly wait for 'confrances' to come."

Students responded more positively to the conferences than to the portfolios. When the project was over, this writer gave students the choice of continuing with portfolios or keeping track of their work in some other way. Eighteen have chosen to continue with the portfolios or with both portfolios and assignment calendars. One student has designed her own assignment calendar which will include her other classes (see Appendix O).

The writer did promise a reward that included taking part in reader's theatres performed for parents. Twenty-nine students of the sixty-two students who finished the project chose to take part in the reader's theatres.

Students keeping portfolios has proven to be successful for these junior high students. Student led parent conferences have been more successful. A majority of the grades went up, and students experienced positive relationships with each other and with their parents.

The records that the writer designed to keep track of the number of excuses (see Appendix E) and kinds of excuses (see Appendix F) were time consuming and cumbersome. She now believes that this was given too much weight in the original plan.

During the conferences, this writer took the part of a spectator taking notes on the interaction between parents and child. It was a pleasure to see parents encouraging their children and asking positive questions. Denby reports success with student-led conferences but also notes that parents did not have confidence in the student's evaluations that he recorded, often turning to the teacher for confirmation. This writer did not have that problem. More often than not, the parents asked probing questions of the students such as, "What is your theory on make up work?" or they asked confirmatory question such as, "Did you study this amount of time?" referring to the student's goal sheets (see Appendix J). A great many of the parents inserted positive comments, "I love to look at papers." Unlike the problems Denby had, this writer's

school parents directed their comments and questions to the students almost exclusively.

In discussions planning the conferences, students asked the writer to start the conferences for them. She agreed and generally began with comments such as, "As you know, _____ will be conducting her own conference this evening, so _____, go ahead and explain your work to your parents."

In many cases, that was all the writer contributed until the student finished. The writer then made some comment about an upcoming event, thanked parents and students for their positive participation, or answered some question about the doctoral program that brought all this about. In the writer's opinion, parents approved of the entire program and would welcome its continuation.

Recommendations

The writer recommends that other junior high school and middle school teachers consider projects aimed at helping students take ownership of their own learning with an emphasis on keeping complete records. She strongly recommends assigning students to assist each other in checking each other's work. She lastly recommends student led-parent conferences that students have discussed and planned with their teacher.

The writer plans to continue having students present their plan for the succeeding grading period to parents at parent-student-teacher conferences; she plans to allow them the choice of keeping portfolios. Those who do not keep formal portfolios, must keep all work in a notebook, trapper or other readily accessible place. One parent has

reported to this writer that her son has posted his plan on the refrigerator at home; two others have made plans to create and follow their own study plan (the one included in Appendix J and one which has not materialized yet). Several student helpers are assigned to aid classmates on a semi-permanent basis. The rationale for this decision is that the collaboration among students and the students' presentations to their parents at conferences appears to have been the most successful aspect of the practicum, and it now appears that continuing these practices will benefit the students' work, their relationship with each other, and their relationship with their parents.

Dissemination

Mr. Del Groen, Director of the Rocky Mountain Region of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) has asked the writer to conduct a seminar at the annual ACSI convention in October 1996 outlining the practicum and its results. He also asked the writer to submit a two or three paragraph article for the quarterly ACSI bulletin (The Rocky Mountain Messenger) giving a brief overview of the project. She plans to do both.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Number of people in this class_____ Grade level_____

STUDENT OWNERSHIP

1. How many students in this class regularly come to class unprepared?_____

2. How many students in this class occasionally come to class unprepared?_____

3. How many students in this class rarely or never come to class unprepared?_____

4. What is the average number of times you are asked to repeat any one assignment for this class?_____

5. How many students in this class regularly do an incomplete job on their assignments or do not follow instructions? ____

6. How many students in this class occasionally do an incomplete job on their assignments or do not follow instructions? _____

7. How many students in this class rarely do an incomplete job on their assignments or do not follow instructions? ____

8. The following is a list of excuses for no work or incomplete work. Rank them in order of frequency making 10 as the most frequently used and 1 as the least frequently used.

If there is an excuse frequently used but not listed below, please write it down and rank it with the others.

._____

_____I didn't write it down

_____I forgot

_____I thought it was due tomorrow

_____I didn't feel well

_____I couldn't find any paper (pencil, etc.)

_____I didn't have time

_____My mom made me go to bed

_____I left it home

_____I didn't know how to do it

_____ (Another excuse)

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Students who come to class unprepared

TEACHER	# of students who regularly come to class unprepared	# of students who occasionally come to class unprepared	# of students who never come to class unprepared
Teacher A	4	13	46
Teacher B	4-7	3-7	55
Teacher C	0	3-6	57-61
Teacher D	11	11	41
Teacher E	3-4	9-10	22-24
Teacher F	0	2	13

Students who do incomplete work

TEACHER	# of students who regularly do incomplete work	# of students who occasionally do incomplete work	# of students who never do incomplete work
Teacher A	1	4	58
Teacher B	5-7	4	55-56
Teacher C	1	5-7	59-60
Teacher D	11	11	41
Teacher E	8	8-10	23-24
Teacher F	2	3	10

Average number of times students ask for assignments to be repeated

	7th	8th
Teacher A	3	1
Teacher B	3	2
Teacher C	0	0
Teacher D	2	2
Teacher E	2	2
Teacher F	NA	

Kinds of excuses in order of frequency

I forgot	Most frequent
I didn't have time	2nd Most frequent
I didn't have time (intended repeat)	3rd Most frequent
I left it at home	4th Most frequent
I didn't feel well	5th Most frequent
I thought it was due tomorrow (or another time)	6th Most frequent
I didn't write it down	7th Most frequent
I couldn't find any paper,(pencil, etc)	8th Most frequent
My mom (or another person) make me go to bed	9th Most frequent
Another excuse (not specified)	10th Most frequent

APPENDIX C

ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR

ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR

Name_____

Assignment title	
Date assigned	
Date due	
Page #s if appropriate	
Directions	
Grade	

Assignment title	
Date assigned	
Date due	
Page #s if appropriate	
Directions	
Grade	

APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT RECORD OF MATERIALS IN PORTFOLIO

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT RECORD OF MATERIALS IN PORTFOLIO

NAME_____

ORIGINAL PAPER				INTERIM COPY			FINAL PAPER		
Title of paper	Date	Grade		Date	Grade		Date	Grade	

Grades will be entered in the form of percentages

93%+ =A
85% - 92% =B
75% - 84% =C
70% -74% = D

APPENDIX E

CLASS EXCUSE RECORD - FREQUENCY

CLASS EXCUSE RECORD - FREQUENCY

Date	# of people in class	# of assignments not done	# of excuses vs "No excuse"

APPENDIX F

CLASS EXCUSE RECORD - KIND

CLASS EXCUSE RECORD - KIND

Date	Excuse given (Also recorded in practicum log)

APPENDIX G

MECHANISM FOR RECORDING UNEXPECTED EVENTS

MECHANISM FOR RECORDING UNEXPECTED RESULTS

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

Description of event

Reason for occurrence if possible to determine

Description of how situation was handled

Description of result

Measures taken to prevent reoccurrence if reoccurrence is not desirable

Positive outcomes and possible changes to project as a result of event

APPENDIX H

REPORT TO PARENTS

MISS USELMAN'S LATEST PROJECT

STUDENT OWNERSHIP

Students are keeping detailed calendars with all their English assignments listed

They will be giving each other a few reminders and some constructive criticism throughout the grading period

They will be keeping all their work in portfolios in the classroom

Finally, they will be conducting the next parent-teacher conference themselves

It should be fun. Pray for us.

APPENDIX I

POINTS TO BE AWARDED FOR PORTFOLIO AND CONFERENCE WORK

POINTS TO BE AWARDED FOR PORTFOLIO AND CONFERENCE WORK

NAME_____

Completed assignment records in portfolio

Teacher Check Month 1 Week 2 (Nov. 13) -2-possible points, ____points given

Inclusion of all materials in portfolio

Teacher Check Month 1 Week 2 (Nov. 13) -2-possible points, ____points given
Student Check Month 1 Week 3 (Nov. 27) -1-possible point, ____points given
(based on agreement between the evaluator and the person being evaluated)

Goal sheet completed

Teacher check Month 1 Week 4 (Nov. 27) -2-possible points, _____points given

Positive student assistance of other students

Month 1 Week 3 (Nov. 20) -2-possible points, _____points given
Month 2 Week 3 (Dec. 18) -2-possible points, _____points given

Student self-evaluation

Month 2 Week 3 (Dec. 18) -2-possible points,_____points given
Month 3 Week 1 (Jan. 15) -2-possible points, _____points given

Parent-teacher-student conference

Student preparation for conference -3-possible points,_____points given

Student handling of parent conference (Observed for Support of grades to parents

Calendars complete -3- possible points, ____points given
Inclusion of all materials in portfolio -3- possible points, ____points given

TOTAL _____

APPENDIX J

STUDENT GOALS

STUDENT GOALS

Grammar

Projected time spent weekly doing assignments _____

Projected time spent weekly counseling with teacher _____

Projected time spent weekly making up assignments _____

Grade expected _____

Essays and research papers

Projected time spent weekly doing assignments _____

Projected time spent weekly counseling with teacher _____

Projected time spent weekly making up assignments _____

Grade expected _____

Spelling

Projected time spent weekly doing assignments _____

Projected time spent weekly counseling with teacher _____

Projected time spent weekly making up assignments _____

Grade expected _____

Literature

Projected time spent weekly doing assignments _____

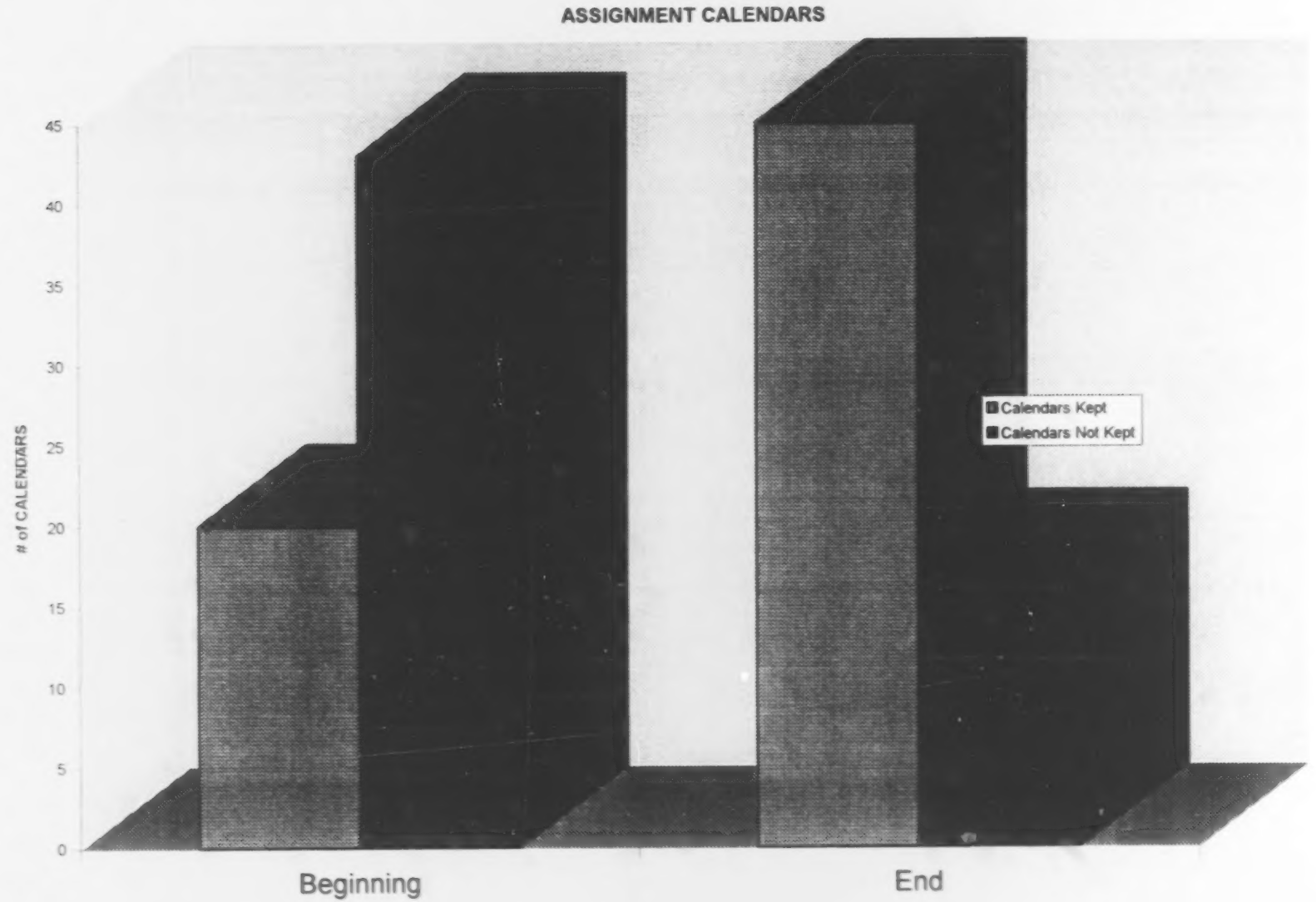
Projected time spent weekly counseling with teacher _____

Projected time spent weekly making up assignments _____

Grade expected _____

APPENDIX K

CHART- ASSIGNMENT CALENDARS



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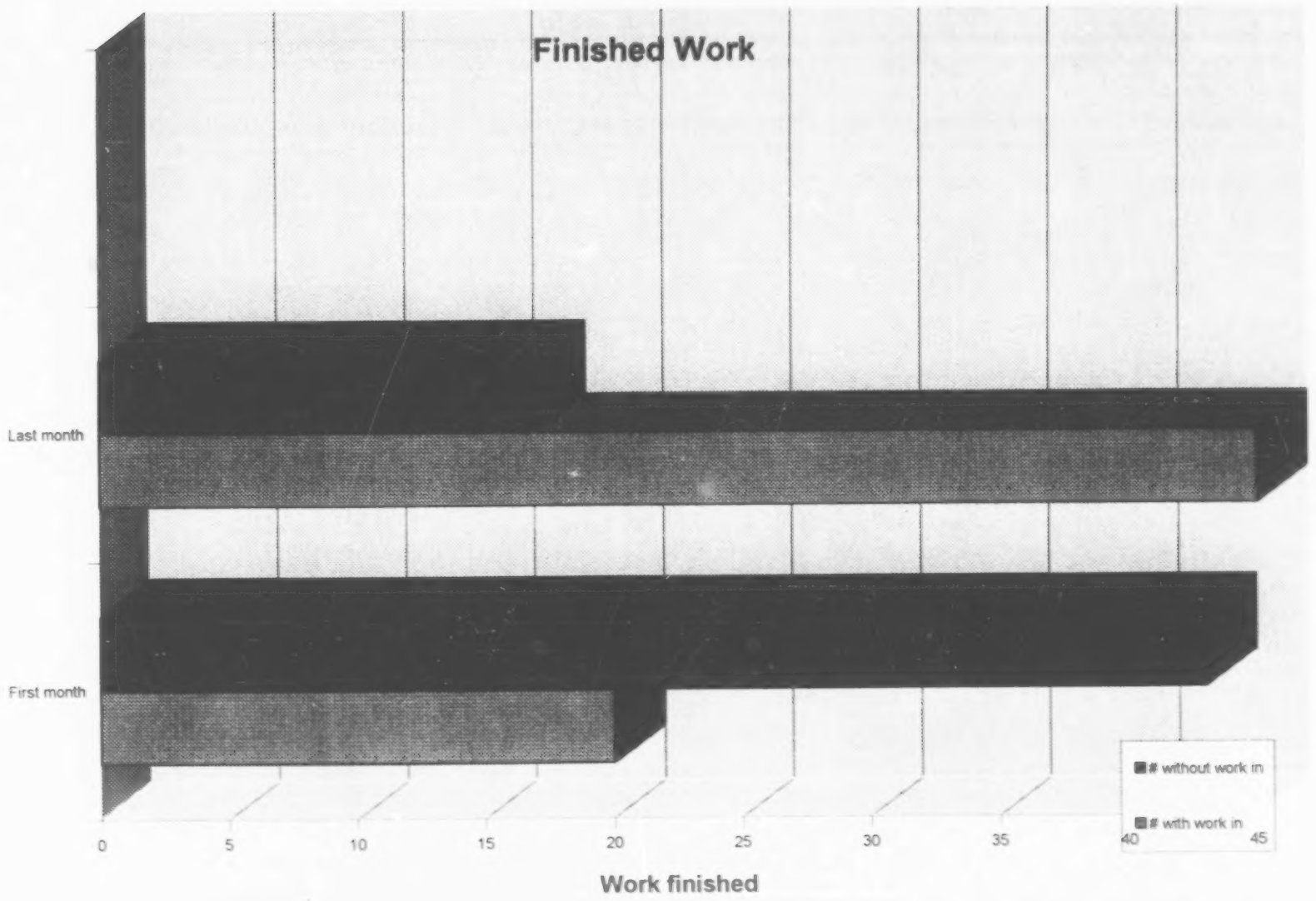
APPENDIX L

CHART - FINISHED WORK



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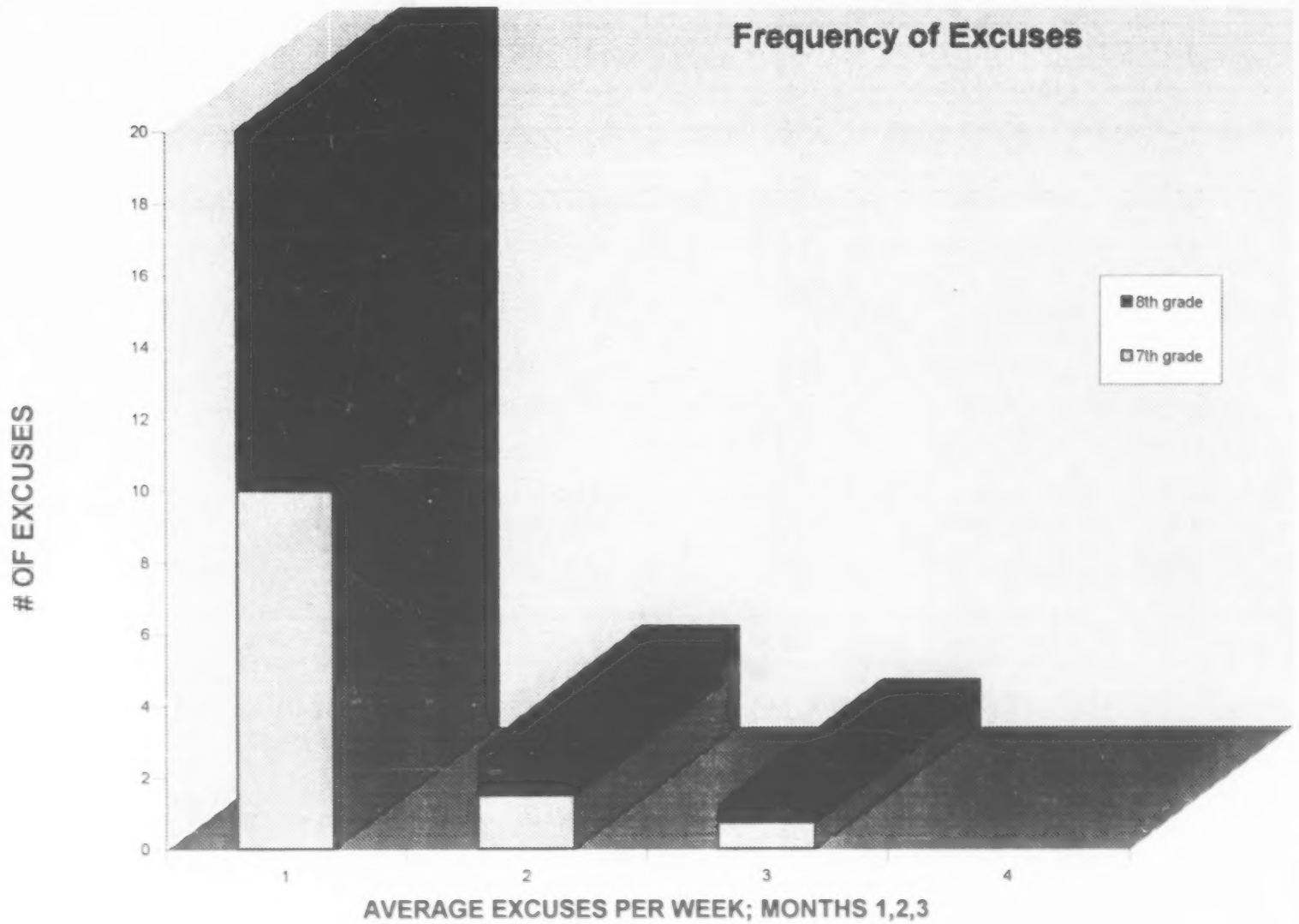
APPENDIX M

CHART - FREQUENCY OF EXCUSES



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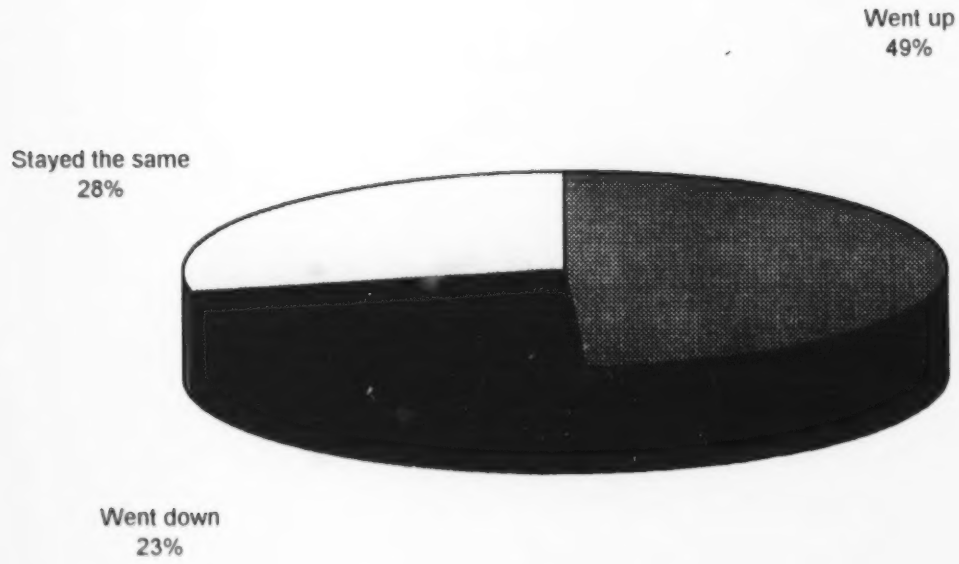
APPENDIX N

CHART - GRADE CHANGES

Grade Changes



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APPENDIX O

STUDENT CREATED ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR

MONDAY	
Math- *Grade:*	*Home Ec.-* *Grade:*
Themes- *Grade:*	*Gov.-* *Grade:*
Bible- *Grade:*	*Science-* *Grade:*
TUESDAY	
Math- *Grade:*	*P.E.-* *Grade:*
Grammar- *Grade:*	*Gov. -* *Grade:*
Bible- *Grade:*	*Science-* *Grade:*
WEDNESDAY	
Math- *Grade:*	*Home Ec.-* *Grade:*
Spelling- *Grade:*	*Gov.-* *Grade:*
Bible- *Grade:*	*Science-* *Grade:*
THURSDAY	
Math- *Grade:*	*P.E.-* *Grade:*
Grammar- *Grade:*	*Gov. -* *Grade:*
Bible- *Grade:*	*Science-* *Grade:*
FRIDAY	
Math- *Grade:*	*Gov.-* *Grade:*
Literature- *Grade:*	*Science-* *Grade:*
Bible- *Grade:*	